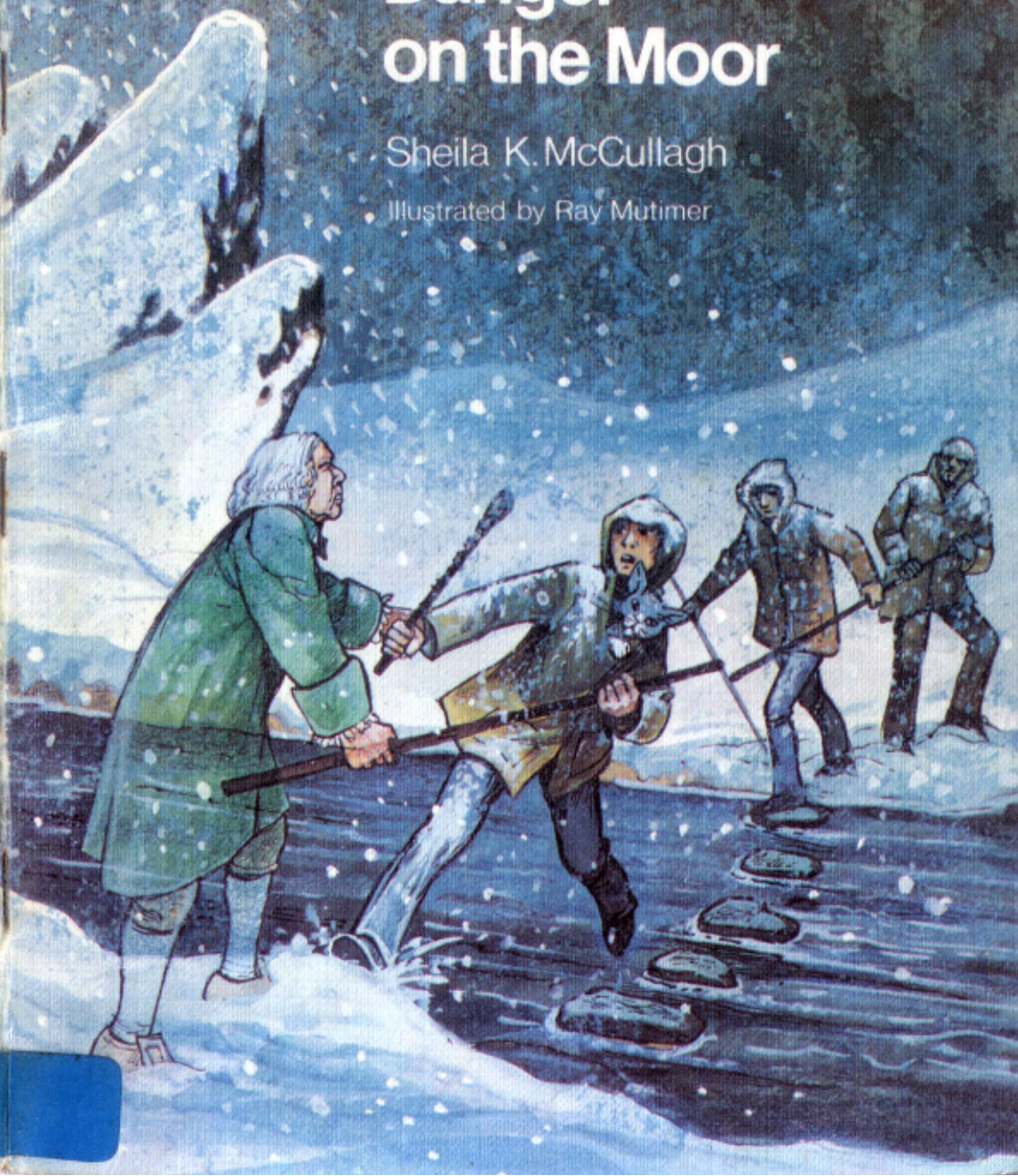


Tim and the Hidden People

Danger on the Moor

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Ray Mutimer



Danger on the Moor



Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Ray Mutimer

E. J. ARNOLD & SON LIMITED LEEDS



Tim sat beside Arun, with Alan Tremaine and Grandfather Strome, at the table in the cottage by the stream. They were having breakfast. There was bread and butter and honey. Pen came in with a jug of goat's milk, and put it on the table. Sebastian was sitting on the table, too, listening to what everyone said. Grandfather Strome was telling them how he came to be with them.

"Melinda sent word that the boys were coming north," said Grandfather Strome. "And I knew why. I knew they were coming to help Alan Tremaine, who was trying to free Gareth and Fiona from the stone prisons. So I set the birds to keep watch for me. You've seen the seagulls, flying over you on the moor? They brought me a message yesterday. The wind witches had called up a storm. They had sunk your boat and you were all in danger. I set sail at once. I had only just left the island, when I saw Bec's boat, and asked Bec for news. Bec told me that Tim was on Diaman's Island. So I went there to pick him up."

"That was dangerous," said Alan Tremaine. "You know that Diaman has been angry with the Hidden People ever since one of them stole some silver water. He put the spider in the cave, so that it would never happen again."

Grandfather Strome nodded.

"I know that very well," he said. "But Bec had just been to the island in the storm, and Diaman wasn't there. And yet I think he must have come to the island later. I thought I saw his boat, in the darkness of the night."

“Diaman would never have let Tim go, if he’d been on the island himself,” said Pen. “And that dwarf of his might have thrown the boy over the cliff.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Grandfather Strome. “Perhaps Diaman did come. If he did, he came after Tim had taken the silver water. But I think he has been there.”

“Well, Tim’s safe here with us now, anyway,” said Pen. “He has the silver water. That’s the important thing. The first part of this dangerous journey is over.”

“But now we come to the second part,” said Alan Tremaine. “We must make our way north, to the Hill of the Stone Prisons.”

“I shall come with you,” said Grandfather Strome.

“No!” said Pen. “No! It’s bad enough that Alan and the boys are going. You mustn’t go too, at your age. You can drive the wind witches away, but you’re too old to fight the stone men. It’s too dangerous.”

Grandfather Strome drew himself up. His eyes were very angry.

“Be quiet, woman!” he cried. “When have I ever been afraid of danger? What makes you think I shall let a boy go into danger by himself, to free my own children from the stone prisons?”

“The boy has the shield stone,” said Pen. “The stone men cannot see him. But there is only one shield stone.”

“The shield stone will not keep him safe from the wind witches,” said Grandfather Strome in a deep voice. “And the wind witches have gone north. Did you notice that the wind has changed? It’s blowing from the south now. I’m not frightened of the wind witches – my magic is stronger than theirs. I shall go with Alan and the boys to the north. Then, if the wind witches come, I can drive them away. They cannot take *me* to their cave, as they took Alan Tremaine.”

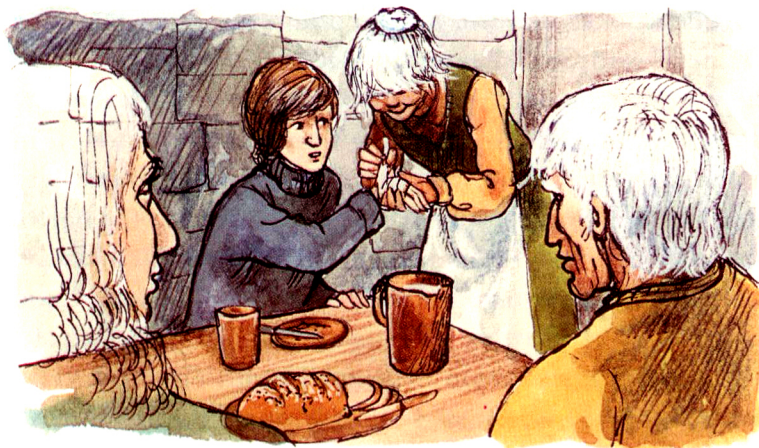
“I think that we should all go north, with Tim, to the Hill of the Stone Prisons,” said Alan Tremaine quietly. “All except you, Pen. You are not strong enough to fight the stone men, and we shall need you here when we return. We must all go as far as the hill. Then Tim can go on alone, past the stone men who will be on guard. The stone men cannot see Tim. But they can see Gareth and Fiona. And as soon as they are set free, Gareth and Fiona will have to fight their way down the hill, past the stone men. We must be there to help them.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” said Pen. “Let me look at that hand again, Tim.”

Tim unwrapped his right hand, and held it out. “It’s much better,” he said.

Pen looked at it, and nodded. “It will do,” she said. “I’ll bandage it for you.”

She went to a cupboard, and came back with a strip of white cloth.

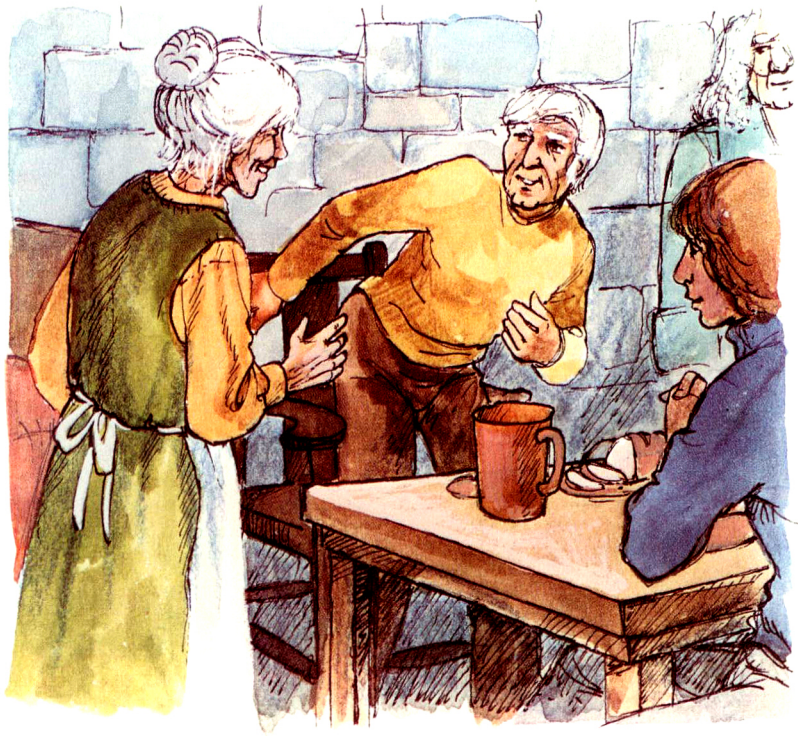


Pen laughed. “I’m not afraid of you, Duncan Strome – even when you thunder at me,” she said. “But you were right and I was wrong this time. It doesn’t often happen like that.”

“You’re right, Alan,” said Grandfather Strome, watching Pen bandage Tim’s hand. “We shall need everyone who can come. I have sent a message to the moor people. They will be on the look-out for us. If we rescue Gareth and Fiona, they will give us shelter. I shall leave my boat here with you, Pen. We will return here, and sail home to the island.”

He got up.

“Are you ready, Tim? We should set out now. Thank you for your help, Pen. I shall not forget. But don’t try to stop me by telling me that I’m too old!”



Alan Tremaine pushed back his chair.

“We must go,” he said. “We’ve a long way to go, and we must find shelter tonight. We don’t want to sleep out on the open moor, with the stone men about. Goodbye, Pen, and thank you for all your help. We needed help badly yesterday, and we shall need it again, when we come back.”

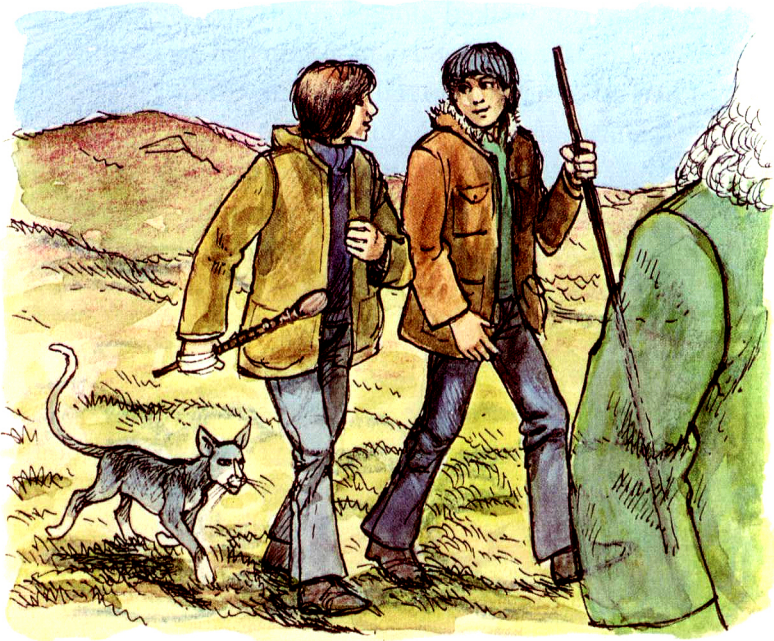
“The cottage will be ready for you,” Pen said.



Tim and Arun slipped on their anoraks. Tim picked up Digory's club. Pen gave a strong wooden staff to Grandfather Strome, another to Alan Tremain, and a third staff to Arun.

"If you must fight the stone men, fight them with these," she said. "They are made of oak, and there is magic in them. They will knock down the stones."

They all thanked her again, and she stood in the doorway, watching them, as they made their way up the path towards the moor.



Tim felt happier than he had felt for a long time. He had the silver water. Soon, he would have to go on alone, to find the stone prisons and set the prisoners free. But just now he was walking over the moor with Arun beside him, and Sebastian at his heels. Grandfather Strome strode on ahead of them, talking to Alan Tremain. The sun was shining. Their pockets were stuffed with bread and cheese, given to them by Pen. Tim decided that he wouldn't think about the stone prisons yet. He was going to enjoy himself in the sunshine for one day at least.

Tim and Arun walked along happily, telling each other about all the things which had happened since they last met. There was so much to tell, that they didn't notice how far they walked, or how the countryside was changing.

It was only when they stopped to eat, that Tim looked up and saw great stones standing on the hills. There were jagged stones on almost every hill and hillock, sticking up high out of the earth, pointing towards the sky. They were the strangest stones Tim had ever seen.

Alan saw him looking at them.

"We are coming towards the country of the stone men, Tim," he said. "I haven't seen any yet – but you should begin to keep a sharp look-out now."

Tim nodded, and stared across at the great stones.

"It's much colder," said Arun. "The wind's getting up again, too."

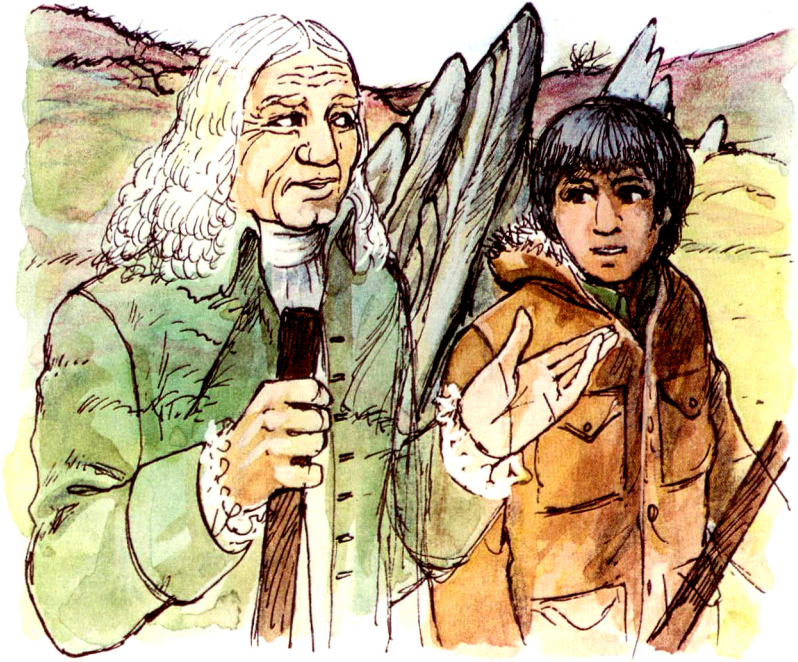
Arun was right. A cold wind had come up. The sun had gone in, and clouds were beginning to blow across the sky.

Alan Tremaine looked up at the hills. "There's going to be another storm," he said. "Will this be the wind witches again, Duncan?"

Grandfather Strome watched the clouds blowing up for a few moments before he answered.

"I think we shall see the wind witches before long," he said quietly. "I am glad that I came."

"So are we," said Arun. Grandfather Strome's deep voice made him feel safer.



Grandfather Strome looked at Arun and smiled. “You’re not afraid of the wind witches yourself,” he said, “if everything that Alan has been telling me is true. There’s no need to be afraid of them, while I’m with you. They can call up a storm, and we shall get wet, but it will be no worse than that.”



“It’s getting very cold,” said Alan Tremaine. “We had better keep moving. There’s nowhere to shelter, if the storm does break over us.”

Alan was right. They were following a narrow, stony path across the heather, and the bare moor stretched out on each side of them. They had come inland from the coast, and the sea was a long way over to their left, across the moor. The only shelter was among the great stones which stood among the heather and along the path, and there was not much shelter there.

They struggled on against the wind, which was growing stronger. Great clouds were blowing up, and the sky was very dark.



Something white drifted down in front of Tim's face, like a white feather. Then another speck of white fell, and another.

"Snow!" cried Alan Tremaine. "The witches have called up a storm of snow! Look! There they are!"

He pointed up into the air, towards one of the hills.

Tim and Arun looked upwards.



There were the witches! They were riding the wind, high up in the air above the hills. As Tim watched, they swept up over a hill and across the sky in the whirling snow.

“They’ll not dare to come any nearer,” cried Grandfather Strome. “If they come nearer, I’ll bring them down out of the air. My magic is strong enough for that, and they know it.”

“Is your magic strong enough to stop the storm, Duncan?” cried Alan Tremaine. “Because if it’s not, we must find shelter, and find it quickly.”



“There’s no shelter for miles,” said Grandfather Strome. “I had thought we could spend the night in the ruined cottage, by the brown stream that runs down from the hills. It’s the nearest place. We must get there as soon as we can. I’ll lead the way. Follow me, Tim, and keep as close to me as you can. That will give you some shelter from the wind and snow. Arun, keep close behind Tim. And you come last, Alan, and make sure we don’t lose anyone.”



Tim bent down, and picked up Sebastian. He opened his anorak, and tucked the little cat safely inside. Then he zipped the anorak up again, so that only Sebastian's head was looking out of it.

Sebastian purred loudly.



They struggled along against the snow. The snowflakes were falling so thickly now, that they could see very little. The snow swept past them in the wind. Tim's hands were very cold, and his feet were colder still. He could scarcely feel them. He struggled on, keeping as close to Grandfather Strome's back as he could.

Arun trod in Tim's footsteps. He bent his head against the wind.

The whole world was white with falling snowflakes.

They seemed to be going on for hours, seeing nothing but the white snow.

Tim had been thinking for some time that he couldn't go very much farther, when they came to the stream. The water looked very black, against the white banks of snow.

There were stepping stones across the stream, blown clear of snow by the wind. But they were very slippery, and both Tim and Arun would have slipped, and fallen into the water, if Grandfather Strome and Alan hadn't helped them. Grandfather Strome and Alan held their staffs out across the water, for the boys to grip as they stepped from stone to stone.

The path on the far side of the stream was so deep with snow, that Tim knew he would never have been able to find it. But Grandfather Strome seemed to know the way, and he pushed on ahead through the snow-covered clumps of heather. The others followed, stepping in his footsteps.

At last Tim stumbled. He would have fallen, if Grandfather Strome had not turned and caught him.

"Steady, boy, steady!" said Grandfather Strome. "You can rest very soon now. We've come to the cottage."

Tim looked up, and saw a large mound of snow ahead of him. Grandfather Strome helped him towards it.

"We're not the first here," Alan Tremaine called warningly from behind him. "We're not the first here, Duncan. Someone has lit the fire."

Tim saw a black open doorway in front of him, and stumbled through it into the ruined cottage.





The door and windows had long since gone, and one of the corners had fallen in, but the roof and walls of the cottage were still standing. The whole cottage was just one long room. There was a great granite fireplace, and a chimney still stood in the end wall. A fire was blazing on the granite hearth.

As they struggled in through the door, a girl got up from a stone by the fire, and turned towards them.

She was younger than Tim, and very brown-skinned, as if she spent all her time in the open air. She was wearing a tunic, which came nearly to her knees. It was made of dark woollen cloth. It had long sleeves, and was tied at her waist with a cord. She was wearing trousers under the tunic, and tall, shapeless boots, made of soft leather, which were tied to her legs. Her eyes were brown, and she stood there for a moment, staring at them and looking frightened.

Then her face changed, and she smiled with delight.

“Grandfather Strome!” she cried. “Grandfather Strome! Do you remember me? Morag, of the moor people?”

“I remember you very well, Morag,” said Grandfather Strome. “But what are you doing here?”

“I was looking for you,” said Morag. “All the moor people are out, looking for you. They got your message. But the snow came. It was so thick on the hills, that we couldn’t see. I lost the others. Then I saw the wind witches, riding the clouds of snow.” She shivered. “I hid here in the ruined cottage until they had gone. But it will soon be dark, and I couldn’t get back tonight, in all this snow. So I lit the fire. When you came in, I thought for a moment that you were wind witches, or stone men. I’m so glad you’ve come.”

“I’m glad we’ve found you, Morag,” said Grandfather Strome. “And I’m glad to see the fire. This is Tim, and this is Arun, and this is Alan Tremaine. We must spend the night here ourselves. They can’t go any farther.”

They all pulled loose blocks of stone from the fallen corner across to the fireplace, and sat down on them, as close to the warmth as they could. Alan went outside and cut some twigs from a bush by the stream. He tied them round his staff, to make a broom. Then he swept the cottage free of the snow which had blown inside.



He found some old sacks in a corner, and hung them over the doorway and over the windows, to keep out the cold. Then he sat down and they all ate some of the bread and cheese which Pen had given them.

By the time they had finished, the wind had dropped, and the snow had stopped falling.

Alan Tremaine went outside again, and found some dry bracken stacked in a little barn, and some more empty sacks. He brought them all inside, and put the bracken in piles near the fire for them to sleep on.

Tim lay down thankfully, with Arun near him. Alan tossed a sack over each of them. Sebastian tunnelled under Tim's sack, and curled up next to him, purring loudly.

Alan opened a wooden cupboard, that still stood by the far wall, and found an old blanket inside. The mice had been at it, but it was still a blanket. He handed it to Morag.

Morag shook her head. "I'm used to the moor, and my clothes are warm. I don't need it," she said. "Give it to the boys."

Alan laughed. "Take it," he said. "The boys won't take it, if you haven't got anything. And the sacks are warmer than this old thing, anyway."

Morag opened her mouth to say 'no', but she suddenly changed her mind. She looked at the blanket. It had once been almost white. In spite of the holes made by the mice, it was still a big cloth.



Morag's eyes shone with a sudden delight.

"Thank you, Alan. I will take it," she said.

Alan made up the fire.

Tim couldn't stay awake any longer. His eyes closed, and he dropped down, down, down, into a deep sleep.



Tim was dreaming. He was lying on a raft, floating across the sea. But the raft began tossing in the waves. Something was shaking him – shaking him hard.

Tim opened his eyes, and sat up. It was still dark in the ruined cottage, but the fire was glowing red. Morag was beside him.

As soon as she saw that he was awake, she stopped shaking him, and put a finger to her lips.

“Tim,” she whispered. “Tim – don’t make a sound!”

Tim looked around the cottage. The others were still asleep. He could see them in the firelight.

“What is it?” he whispered.

“Tim,” whispered Morag, “have you thought about what will happen now?”

Tim shook his head. “How do we know what will happen?” he said. “I hope I’ll get to the stone prisons. But I don’t know what will happen then.”

“I’ll tell you what will happen then,” whispered Morag. “If you go over the moor with Grandfather Strome and the others, all the stone men on the moor will know you are coming, and they’ll be waiting for you. They’ll form a guard round the Hill of the Stone Prisons – a ring of stone men.

“*You* may be able to pass through that ring: you’ve got the shield stone. But how will Gareth and Fiona break through the ring of stone men? Your friends will have to break a way through the ring for them. And the moor people – my people – will help them. But there is only one shield stone. The stone men are very strong, and very dangerous. Some of the moor people, and perhaps some of your friends, will be killed. Perhaps Gareth and Fiona themselves will be killed. And what happens afterwards? The stone men will hunt the moor people wherever they can find them. You and your friends can go safely home. But the moor people will be left behind, to the fury of the stone men.”



“But – but we’ve got to save Gareth and Fiona,” whispered Tim. “We can’t leave them to spend the rest of their lives in the stone prisons. I’d give them the shield stone, if I could – but I can’t give it away, without the proper spell, or it wouldn’t work.”

“I know that,” whispered Morag. “But there’s another way to do it, Tim. The wind witches think that they have shut you up here in the cottage tonight – that they have shut you in, with the snow.

“They won’t call up another storm tomorrow. They don’t need to. It will take you two days to struggle on, through the deep snow, to the Hill of the Stone Prisons. The wind witches will have gone off to tell the stone men that you are coming. They can find you easily enough – they only have to look for your tracks in the snow.

“But you could get away now. You’ve got Sebastian with you, and the broomstick Alan made is over there, leaning against the wall. Sebastian is a Strange One, isn’t he? He can fly a broomstick?”

Tim nodded. He looked at Sebastian, who had come out from under the sack, and was sitting looking at Morag. Sebastian’s eyes were very bright and very green in the glow of light from the fire.

“You don’t know the way, but I do,” whispered Morag. “I’ll come with you. I’ll show you the way. We can hide at the foot of the Hill of the Stone Prisons. We can get there before it’s light and wait till evening. I know a place to hide. I’ll stay hidden, while you fly on to the great stones.

“The stone men can’t see you, while you have the shield stone. Gareth and Fiona can fly over the stone men on the broomstick as soon as they’re free, and you can slip down unseen. And no one will have to fight. And no one will die.”

Tim stared at Morag. There was only one question in his mind. Was Morag really trying to help them. Or was this a trap? Would she take him over the moor to the wind witches or the stone men?



Morag looked straight back into his eyes. Her face was anxious, but Tim felt that he could trust her. She was anxious for the safety of her own people. But she was telling him the truth. He glanced at Sebastian.

Sebastian was looking very hard at Morag, too. But as Tim watched, Sebastian suddenly got up, and walked over towards the doorway with a soft “Rrrrr!”

He twitched his tail, and the broomstick left the wall, and floated in the air beside him. Sebastian looked back over his shoulder at Tim.

“Rrrrr!” he said.



"I'll come," whispered Tim. "Sebastian thinks it's the right thing to do, too. But won't the witches see us, as we ride over the white snow?"

"Alan gave me a blanket," said Morag softly. "It's almost white. We'll wrap ourselves in that. The witches won't dare to come near the cottage, with Grandfather Strome here. If any of them are watching, they'll be a long way off. They won't see us, if we're wrapped in the white blanket. Come on."

Very softly, Tim got to his feet. He picked up Digory's club, and went over to the door. He held the sack on one side. Sebastian jumped on to the broomstick, and rode it outside.

Morag followed.



Tim took one last look around the cottage. He didn't want to leave them, without telling them what he was going to do. But he knew that they would want to go with him, to protect him. This was something he had to decide for himself.

They were all deeply asleep.

They had all been tired out by the struggle through the storm to the cottage.

Tim stepped outside and let the sack drop down behind him.

The moon was up, and the stars were bright. On every side, the white moors stretched away, covered in snow.

There was no sign of the witches, nor of any stone men.

Morag was already sitting on the broomstick, waiting for him.

Tim sat down behind her, and they wrapped the white blanket all around them. Only Sebastian, standing on the end of the broomstick, was outside it, and Sebastian was grey and white: he didn't show up against the snow, as they would have done.

"All right, Sebastian," whispered Tim. "Let's go."

Sebastian twitched his tail, and the broomstick flew over the snow-covered moors towards the far hills.



Printed in England by E. J. ARNOLD & SON LIMITED Leeds

FLIGHTPATH TO READING

A Series

1. Tim and Tobias
2. All the Fun of the Fair
3. Tim Meets Captain Jory
4. Tim and the Smugglers
5. Tim and the Witches
6. The Highwayman
7. Magic in The Yard
8. The Key

B Series

1. The Return of the Key
2. Captain Jory Lends a Hand
3. The Stump People
4. Watchers in The Yard
5. Red for Danger
6. At the House of the Safe Witch
7. Tim in Hiding
8. On the Night of the Full Moon

C Series

1. The Pool by the Whispering Trees
2. Tim in Trouble
3. On the Road to the North
4. Riding into Danger
5. Mandrake's Castle
6. Escape by Night
7. Three Fires on the Dark Tower
8. Tim Rides on the Ghost Bus

D Series

1. News from the North
2. The Cry in the Dark
3. The Shield Stone
4. The Storm over the Sea
5. The Cave of the Wind Witches
6. In Diaman's Cave
7. Danger on the Moor
8. At the Hill of the Stone Prisons

Flightpath to Reading **D7**



E.J. ARNOLD